

Mary Turck, *Twin Cities Daily Planet*

Kill Planned Parenthood - that's the plan from Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives, who slashed all Title X funding for Planned Parenthood from their latest budget bill. On February 24 in St. Paul, Congressmember Betty McCollum joined a crowded waiting room full of Planned Parenthood supporters determined to push back and protect services that include contraception, annual gynecological exams, patient education and more.

"Prohibiting Planned Parenthood from receiving federal reimbursement for the preventative services they provide is just the latest Republican assault on women's health," said McCollum of the budget cuts. "For decades, Planned Parenthood has provided millions of women with affordable comprehensive health care services - such as family planning services, HIV testing and counseling, testing for sexually transmitted infections, routine physicals, cancer screenings, and many other critical health care services. Any effort in Congress that denies women access to health services is a step backwards and puts women's lives in danger."

Agnes Under the Big Top at Mixed Blood
view counter

"I think they know they can't pass this in the Senate," McCollum told the group, adding that Democrats want smart investments, not "dumb cuts."

Deb Zupke, a former Planned Parenthood patient, said she and her older sisters started going to Planned Parenthood in high school and college. As the daughters of a dairy farmer, "We were not the richest people in town," she said, and the low-cost annual exams and contraception fit their budgets. An exam at Planned Parenthood discovered one of her sisters had cervical cancer and, because it was caught in the early stages, her sister was treated successfully. Zupke stopped going to Planned Parenthood after she got a job with health insurance, but one older sister liked the clinic so much that she continued to use Planned Parenthood as her primary health care provider for years-until she was pregnant with her first (and planned) child.

While they went to one of more than a dozen Planned Parenthood clinics in greater Minnesota, the sisters fit the income profile of Rice Street Planned Parenthood patients, 71 percent of whom have an income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. Only two percent of Rice Street patients can afford the full cost of their care, according to information furnished by Planned Parenthood.

Barbara Clark of Vadnais Heights said she is here for her two sons, ages eight and eleven, as much as for her nieces and other women she knows. "They're going to grow up and need access to family planning," Clark said. "It's their responsibility as much as their female partners."

Clark said friends have used Planned Parenthood services for low-cost contraception, especially when they had no health insurance, and one male friend had used the services for a vasectomy. (Planned Parenthood of Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota reports that about six percent of their patients are men.)

Clark noted that Planned Parenthood offers mother-and-son education on sexuality, and that she hopes to bring her sons to the classes when they are older. She said she needs help in educating about sexuality, particularly because of the "media pressure to be sexual" and the over-the-top, no-boundaries portrayal of sexuality in the media. She is concerned that children are exposed to disturbing sexual imagery and wants to be sure that her sons have "tools for good decision-making" about sexuality.

The Title X cuts passed by the House of Representatives prohibit any funding to health care providers that also provide abortion services. No Title X funding, or any federal funding at all, can be used for abortion services. The federal funding supports services for low-income patients. The Rice Street Planned Parenthood Clinic fact sheet said it provides:

- * Birth control (pill, patch, ring, shot, implant, IUD, diaphragm, condoms, fertility awareness)
- * Emergency contraception (Plan B)
- * Testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STI)
- * Testing and treatment for vaginal infections and urinary tract infections
- * HIV testing, counseling, and referral
- * Pregnancy testing, counseling, and referral for adoption, abortion, and prenatal care
- * Annual exams, including screening for breast, cervical, and testicular cancer
- * Advanced gynecological care, including colposcopy and LEEP
- * Routine physicals for women and men, along with patient education
- * Vaccines to prevent Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and Hepatitis B
- * General health care services (cholesterol and diabetes screening, anemia testing)

According to Planned Parenthood, its typical Minnesota patient is a woman in her late twenties who is at or below the federal poverty level.